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ABSTRACT

Midway College, a two-year liberal arts college in Kentucky's Bluegrass region, established a business program emphasizing second language skills in response to the local need for personnel with knowledge of French or Spanish. The program brought together existing business and general studies courses, including geography, and new courses in business French and Spanish and an introductory course in international business. The intermediate language courses offer literature and grammar emphases to transfer students and business communication to the Bilingual Business Program participants. A 6-week summer course abroad (International Living/Learning Experience) prepares students for the second-year intermediate language courses. To complete the program, students must take a local or foreign internship in a business situation requiring foreign language use, and live with a foreign family. Students interested in the thoroughbred horse industry may also take a beginning course in French equine terminology. Other experimental minicourses are offered, including courses in fashion merchandising language and preschool foreign language teaching. Program developments currently anticipated include transfer program articulation, standard curriculum and testing for the two-year program, intermediate language level work exchange programs, business student exchange programs with foreign institutions, and job placement services. (MSE)

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BILINGUAL BUSINESS STUDIES AT THE TWO-YEAR LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE

by

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Bilingual Business Studies at the two-year Liberal Arts College

Gone is the time when the study of a foreign language was a luxury for the few. The acquisition of a language skill is now thought of an absolute necessity from the commercial point of view. New demands from corporations in search of graduates with an international studies background to fill positions at every step of the ladder require a new approach to the study of a foreign language which must emphasize the study of the specialty language as it is used in business, fashion, banking etc. Can the study of the specialty language be integrated into the two-year liberal arts college? and how? How early in the study of the foreign language can the study of the specialty language be introduced? What level of accomplishment can be expected in the study of the specialty language in a two-year program? These are some of the question we propose to consider here as we look at Midway College's Bilingual Business Studies program (BBS).

The circumstances which prompted the idea of a bilingual business studies program are related to the location of Midway. Just a few miles from Lexington, Midway city and the college which bears its name are in the heart of the thoroughbred country. Midway College has an important Equine Office and Management Administration program whose graduates find employment at the large horse farms of Kentucky's Bluegrass region. In the 70s, when an increased amount of business between American and French horse farm owners, breeders and trainers took place, the need was felt for horse farm personnel knowledgeable in French. A number of other businesses in the area started to express a growing need for personnel with the knowledge of a foreign language, especially French and Spanish. The Bilingual Business Studies program was eventually designed to help Midway College's graduates be better prepared to face these needs.

The new program was to provide students with a general education, a business education, and the working knowledge of a foreign language. To courses taken from the general studies and business programs only three new courses: ~~such as~~ business Spanish, business French and Introduction to International Business, needed to be added to constitute the new program.

The Bilingual Business Studies curriculum includes 33 credit hours in general studies, 24 in business courses and 12 in French or Spanish. A course in geography is part of required general studies courses. In intermediate language courses emphasis is put on cultural readings and grammar review; special assignments in literary readings are offered to transfer students while business related readings are offered to BBS majors. In this way business terminology is progressively introduced as a preparation for the business French and Spanish courses. These courses are taught once a year in the Spring; they may be taken concurrently with French or Spanish fourth semester language course. The Introduction to International Business course is offered every other year.

In order to help students be better prepared for the intermediate language courses and the French and Spanish business courses, a new optional course was offered: the six-week summer course abroad called International Living/Learning Experience (Ille). This course can be taken at the end of the first year language courses. Students stay with a family abroad in the "au pair" situation; they may take this course for credit, as one of their general studies courses, by studying the civilization of the country during their stay. The advantages of this end of first year course abroad are considerable: students come back from it eager to enter the intermediate level courses; their level in comprehension and speaking ability allow for a remarkable progress during the intermediate courses; the business French or Spanish course can effectively be taught all in French or Spanish in the second semester of the second year.

To complete the program, students must take an internship locally, in a business situation where the foreign language is used, or abroad. The BBS Internship abroad has two objectives: improvement of fluency in the language and to provide students with direct exposure to business practices in the country where the language is spoken. Students live at the work site or with a family. The real challenge has been to locate an internship in relation to the student's field of interest. The internship abroad may be taken concurrently with the summer ILLE course allowing students to earn six credits and be entitled to receive financial aid while studying abroad.

Finally, students interested in the international aspect of the thoroughbred industry may take a one credit hour course in Equine French at the end of the first year French language course. This is a beginning level course on French equine terminology. It is offered every other year. It is designed to prepare students for their internship at a French horse farm.

Other mini-courses are being offered on an experimental basis: one in fashion can be taken as part of the business French course by students interested in the international aspect of fashion merchandising; another one in preschool French is ready to be offered to the Early Childhood Education major wishing to pursue the study of French and to use it at the preschool level. French has been taught for the past three years at Midway College's Preschool.

Such mini-courses help make internships abroad more rewarding and valuable. Over the past two summers we have had students taking internships in a bloodstock agency in Paris, France, in a shipping agency in Mexico City, and on a horse farm in Normandy France. This summer, students will take internships at French horse farms in Normandy, and at a French fashion firm which has a catalogue sales operation in the US.

We are in the third year of the Bilingual Business Studies program. We have been able to observe that such a program encourages students to undertake or pursue the study of a foreign language. Students will more readily study a foreign language knowing that they will have a chance to use it in their field of interest. They will go abroad more willingly knowing they will be able to work in their field of interest while learning the language.

Some of the challenges we have met concern (1) the double-track intermediate language courses; both the literature and the business tracks must be taught simultaneously since classes are too small to be divided; special assignments and audio-visual materials can be used to help resolve this problem; (2) securing business internships and families abroad, especially internships in the students'field of interest at the beginning level; (3) the French and Spanish instructors'training in the teaching of business French and Spanish; a scholarship offered by the French government to the American teachers of business French, as well as two scholarships from Midway College's Faculty Development Fund were used for seminars and internships in business pedagogy; and (4) the availability of appropriate business related audio-visual materials.

Some of the needs we anticipate for the development of the Bilingual Business Studies program at the two-year liberal arts college are related to (1) transfer programs requirements for entrance at the junior level in four-year institutions; (2) standard curriculum and testing for the two-year program; (3) work exchange programs at the intermediate language level such as through the University of Louisville program in Montpellier, France; (4) business students exchange programs with such foreign institutions as the Baccalaureat Technique Supérieur in France perhaps; and (5) the establishment of a placement bureau for the BBS graduates.

In conclusion, the Midway College's experience in bilingual business studies leaves us with these encouraging observations: a bilingual business studies program can be part of a two-year liberal arts curriculum with relatively few demands; business French and Spanish can be introduced at the intermediate level in an effective manner; summer courses and internships abroad make such a program feasible in two years by providing students with fluency in the language and the working knowledge of the target language thus preparing them to enter the international business field at the entry level; favorable response from students indicates that there is a real interest in bilingual business studies programs at the two-year liberal arts college.